



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW:

Picture this: the British are marching towards the White House set to destroy it. What do you do? For the only first lady of the United States from North Carolina, Dolley Madison, you save the treasured portrait of George Washington, that's what.

Dolley Madison was born May 20, 1768, in Guilford County. She grew up near Greensboro and Philadelphia, PA in a strict Quaker family. She was described as being a witty girl with blue eyes, fair skin, and black curls. She caught the eye of Virginia Representative James Madison and the two were married September 1794.

When James Madison was elected to the Presidency, Dolley became the "Queen of America," shunning the somber Quaker dresses from her youth and elevating her wardrobe to a regal, yet simple style.

As the third First Lady she created the model for the position that we think of today. She supported her husband's political positions by hosting dinners, conversing with politicians, and redecorated the White House in a style grand enough to impress foreign diplomats. She was renowned for her social graces and her cheerful personality was a boon to her guests, regardless of their political views. A seat was even reserved for her in the House of Representatives, an honor never before granted to any American woman.

Dolley Madison was also the first First Lady to formally associate herself with a specific public project. She helped to create a Washington, D.C. home for young orphaned girls—working both as a fundraiser and a board member.

Though, the most defining moments of Dolley Madison's time as First Lady was in the hours prior to the British troops burning most of Washington during the War of

1812. On August 22, 1814, President Madison left the White House to review the troops outside the city just before the British invasion. In a letter to her sister, Dolley discussed her husband's concern in leaving: "He inquired seriously whether I had the courage, or firmness to remain in the President's house until his return, on the morrow, or succeeding day, and on my assurance that I had no fear but for him and the success of our army, he left me, beseeching me to take care of myself, and of the cabinet papers, public and private."

Though she was urged to flee, Dolley held fast waiting for news of her husband. She refused to leave the White House and in President Madison's absence, she packed up her husband's papers, the national seal, and—with the help of White House servants—a portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart. She sent all of the items ahead before leaving herself. Shortly after, the British set fire to the White House leaving destruction in their path.

Thanks to Dolley's brave efforts, George Washington's portrait can still be seen today.

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Primary Sources are created at the time of an event, or later by someone who witnessed or experienced something first-hand and shared about it later. We often think of primary sources as old letters, diaries, and documents—and that's right! But, there's a lot more to consider. Buildings, shoes, portraits, photographs, objects, and more! are also primary sources and part of our job at the North Carolina Museum of History is to collect those objects and take care of them. Here are a few primary sources and artifacts connecting to this month's lesson.



H.1914.270.1

Just after the war of 1812, the North Carolina General Assembly voted to have a statue of George Washington placed in the rotunda in the capitol. Thomas Jefferson was asked to recommend a sculptor. His choice was Antonio Canova of Rome, whom he called the greatest sculptor alive. The busy Canova, who had been only 19 years old when the declaration of independence was signed, agreed to make the statue because of his enormous respect for Washington. Canova sought to honor, even glorify, Washington by depicting him in the uniform of a roman general with tunic, tightly fitting body armor (cuirass), and short cape (paludamentum) fastened at the shoulder. The hair style, of course, had to be that of a roman officer. The seated Washington is shown with a pencil (stylus) in his

hand, writing on a tablet the first few words of his farewell address as president. After the statue was finished, it was brought to Raleigh in 1821. Ten years later in 1831, the capitol burned, and the dome fell on the statue. Early in the 20th century, Canova's working model for the North Carolina statue was discovered in his workshop in Possagno, Italy. As a good will gesture, the Italian government had a copy made in plaster of Paris and presented it to the state in 1910. It is this copy that is owned by the North Carolina Museum of History.

BOOK OF THE MONTH:

Dolley Madison Saves George Washington by Don Brown (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2005)

“Dolley was a farm girl who became a fine first lady when she married James Madison. She wore beautiful dresses, decorated her home, and threw lavish parties. Everyone talked about Dolley, and everyone loved her, too. Then war arrived at her doorstep, and Dolley had to meet challenges greater than she’d ever known. So Dolley did one thing she thought might make a difference: she saved George Washington. Not the man himself, but a portrait of him, which would surely have been destroyed by English soldiers. Don Brown once again deftly tells a little known story about a woman who made a significant contribution to American history.”

LEXILE MEASURE:

NC920L

AVAILABLE FROM:

- [NC Public Library](#)
- [Amazon](#)

VOCABULARY:

1. hectic—marked by hurry, confusion, and too much activity.
2. revolution—the overthrow of a political system or government by force
3. quarrel—an argument or disagreement
4. surrender—to turn over or yield to the power or control of another
5. anthem—a song of praise or patriotism



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Dolley Madison have to leave the White House? What was the
2. Do you think Dolley Madison's actions in the story were brave?
3. Can you think of a time when you've been brave?
4. Think about 5 items from the White House you would try to save. What would they be?
5. Turn back to the page when Dolley Madison and company are saving George Washington's portrait. What are some words that come to mind when you see the pictures?

ACTIVITIES:

- **Dolley Dash:**

The mission is to save George Washington's Portrait!

1. Print out a copy of our **George Washington Portrait** puzzle.
2. Cut the pieces of the puzzle out.
3. Ask someone to hide the pieces throughout your class or home.
4. Set a timer.
5. Now, it's time to *dash*!
6. Moving as quickly as you can, collect the pieces of the puzzle and put them back together again. How fast can you *dash*?

- **Draw a Presidential Self-Portrait**

What would you like your portrait to look like when you become president?